

Statement of Rep. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations
June 22, 2006
Central Asia Democracy and Human Rights Promotion Act of 2006

Colleagues, it's my pleasure today to mark up HR 5382, the Central Asia Democracy and Human Rights Promotion Act of 2006.

Since 9/11, the strategic nature of this troubled region for the United States has become apparent, as the five countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are strategically positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Sadly, in the 15 years since independence, respect for human rights and democratization is alarmingly poor. As Chairman of this subcommittee and Helsinki Commission Co-Chairman, I appreciate the wide spectrum of conditions in Central Asia, which is why I introduced this bill to help encourage these countries to vigorously pursue greater respect of fundamental freedoms.

My interest is not just focused on the governments of the five "Stans," but also on U.S. foreign policy. Considering the increase of U.S. involvement in the region, I have been troubled by the apparent lack of a coherent, uniform policy to encourage these governments to respect human rights and democratization. Consequently, a concurrent goal of my bill is to bring greater consistency to U.S. policy, creating a framework to guide our bilateral relations in Central Asia.

The President, through his freedom agenda, has laid out bold principles to guide U.S. foreign policy. The Act supports this agenda by providing \$118 million in assistance for human rights and democracy training, and \$15 million for increased Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America broadcasting.

My bill will also establish a certification mechanism for the distribution of assistance to each government. The Secretary of State will determine whether each has made “significant improvements in the protection of human rights.” This system will have a national security waiver and is modeled on the current system in Foreign Ops appropriations measures for Kazakhstan and expanded for all five countries.

In addition, considering the forced return of Uzbek refugees from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the Act will require the Secretary of State to report on whether any government is “forcibly returning Uzbeks or other refugees who have fled violence and political persecution.” This is modeled on language regarding Kyrgyzstan in Foreign Ops appropriations and expanded for all five countries.

Notably, my legislation will create a sanctions section for Uzbekistan. First, the bill places into law the limitations already established in Foreign Ops appropriations. The limitation prevents funding to the Uzbek Government unless the Secretary of State determines the government is “making substantial and continuing progress” toward respect for human rights and that the Uzbek Government begins a “credible international investigation” of Andijon.

In addition, the Act mirrors European Union sanctions by establishing a visa ban and an export ban on munitions. The sanctions section also establishes an asset freeze for Uzbek officials, their family members, and their associates implicated in the Andijon massacre or involved in other gross violations of human rights.

Protection of fundamental freedoms for the people of Central Asia will ultimately promote long-term stability and security in the region. Acquiescence to

the status quo challenges the sincerity of our stated objectives, as declared in the 2006 National Security Strategy, that the “United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.”

The bill has been cosponsored by a number of Members of the full Committee, and my colleagues on the Subcommittee may wish to be added before we move to mark up the measure. I am asking for the support of Members of this Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations so we can favorably report this bill out of the subcommittee.